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SERMON 1.

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LUKE vii, 22.—*To the Poor the Gospel is preached.*

THE Old Testament closes with a remarkable prediction concerning Messiah and his forerunner. *Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.* Accordingly, at the appointed time, came John the Baptist, *in the spirit and power of Elias*, saying, *Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* In his great work of *preparing the way of the Lord*, he challenged sin without respect of persons. The attempt was hazardous; but, feeling the majesty of his character, he was not to be moved by considerations which divert or intimidate the ordinary man. Name, sect, station, were alike to him. Not even the imperial purple, when it harboured a crime, afforded protection from his rebuke. His fidelity in this point cost him his life. For having *reproved Herod, for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done*, he was thrown into prison, and at length sacrificed to the most implacable of all resentments, the resentment of an abandoned woman.

It was in the interval between his arrest and execution, that he sent to Jesus the message on which my text is grounded. As his office gave him no security against the workings of unbelief in the hour of temptation, it is not strange, if, in a dungeon and in chains, his mind was invaded by an occasional doubt. The question, by two of his disciples, *Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?* has all the air of an inquiry for personal satisfaction; and so his Lord's reply seems to treat it. *Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is*

preached. The answer is clear and convincing. It enumerates the very signs by which the church was to know her God, *for whom she had waited*; and they were enough to remove the suspicions, and confirm the soul, of his servant John.

Admitting that Jesus Christ actually wrought the works here ascribed to him, every sober man will conclude with Nicodemus, *We know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.* It is not, however, my intention to dwell on the miraculous evidence of Christianity. The article, which I select as exhibiting it in a plain but interesting view, is, **THE PREACHING OF GOSPEL TO THE POOR.**

In scriptural language, "the poor," who are most exposed to suffering and least able to encounter it, represent all who are destitute of good necessary to their perfection and happiness; especially those who feel their want, and are disconsolate; especially those who are anxiously *waiting for the consolation of Israel.* Thus in Ps. xl, 17: *I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me.* Thus in Is. xli, 17: *When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst; I, the Lord, will hear them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.* Thus also, ch. lxi, 1: *The Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the MEEK;* the same word with that rendered "poor;" and so it is translated by Luke, ch. iv, 18, *to preach the gospel to the poor*; which is connected, both in the prophet and evangelist, with *healing the BROKEN-HEARTED.* Our Lord, therefore, refers John, as he did the Jews in the synagogue at Nazareth, to this very prediction as fulfilled in himself. So that his own definition of his own religion is, *a system of consolation for the wretched.* This is so far from excluding the *literal poor*, that the success of the gospel with them is the pledge of its success with all others: for they not only form the majority of the human race, but they also bear the chief burden of its calamities. Moreover, as the sources of pleasure and pain are substantially the same in all men; and as affliction, by suspending the influence of their artificial distinctions, reduces them to the level of their common nature; whatever, by appealing to the principles of that nature, promotes the happiness of the multitude, must equally promote the happiness of the residue; and whatever consoles the one, must, in like circumstances, console the other also. As we cannot, therefore, maintain the suitability of the gospel to the literal poor, who are the mass of mankind, without maintaining its prerogative of comforting the afflicted; nor, on the contrary, its prerogative of comforting, separately from its suitability to the mass of mankind, I shall consider these two ideas as involving each other,

With this explanation, the first thing which demands your notice, is the **FACT ITSELF—GOSPEL PREACHED TO THE POOR.**

From the remotest antiquity there have been, in all civilized nations, men who devoted themselves to the increase of knowledge and happiness. Their speculations were subtle, their arguments acute, and many of their maxims respectable. But to whom were their instructions addressed? To casual visitors, to selected friends, to admiring pupils, to privileged orders! In some countries, and on certain occasions, when vanity was to be gratified by the acquisition of fame, their appearances were more public. For example, one read a poem, another a history, and a third a play, before the crowds assembled at the Olympic games. To be crowned there, was, in the proudest period of Greece, the summit of glory and ambition. But what did this, what did the mysteries of pagan worship, or what the lectures of pagan philosophy, avail the *people*? Sunk in ignorance, in poverty, and crime, they lay neglected. Age succeeded to age, and school to school; a thousand sects and systems rose, flourished, and fell; but the degradation of the multitude remained. Not a beam of light found its way into their darkness, nor a drop of consolation into their cup. Indeed a plan for raising them to the dignity of rational enjoyment, and fortifying them against the disasters of life, was not to be expected: for as nothing can exceed the contempt in which they were held by the professors of wisdom; so any human device, however captivating in theory, would have been worthless in fact. The most sagacious heathen could imagine no better means of improving them than the precepts of his philosophy. Now, supposing it to be ever so salutary, its benefits must have been confined to a very few; the notion that the bulk of mankind may become philosophers, being altogether extravagant. They ever have been, and, in the nature of things, ever must be, unlearned. Besides, the groveling superstition and brutal manners of the heathen, presented insuperable obstacles. Had the plan of their cultivation been even suggested, especially if it comprehended the more abject of the species, it would have been universally derided, and would have merited derision, no less than the dreams of modern folly about the perfectibility of man.

Under this incapacity of *instructing* the poor, how would the pagan sage have acquitted himself as their *comforter*? His dogmas, during prosperity and health, might humour his fancy, might flatter his pride, or dupe his understanding; but against the hour of grief or dissolution he had no solace for himself, and could have none for others. I am not to be persuaded, in contradiction to every principle of my animal and rational being, that pain, and misfortune, and death, are no evils;

and are beneath a wise man's regard. And could I work myself up into so absurd a conviction, how would it promote my comfort? Comfort is essentially consistent with nature and truth. By perverting my judgment, by hardening my heart, by chilling my nobler warmth, and stifling my best affections, I may grow stupid; but shall be far enough from consolation. Convert me into a beast, and I shall be without remorse; into a block, and I shall feel no pain. But this was not my request. I asked you for consolation, and you destroy my ability to receive it. I asked you to bear me over death, into the fellowship of immortals, and you begin by transforming me into a monster! Here are no glad tidings: nothing to cheer the gloom of outward or inward poverty. And the pagan teacher could give no better. From him, therefore, the miserable, even of his own country, and class, and kindred, had nothing to hope. But to *lift the needy from the dunghill*, and wipe away the tears from the mourner; to lighten the burdens of the heart; to heal its maladies, repair its losses, and enlarge its enjoyments; and that under every form of penury and sorrow, in all nations, and ages, and circumstances; as it is a scheme too vast for the human faculties, so, had it been committed to merely human execution, it could not have proceeded a single step, and would have been remembered only as a frantic reverie.

Yet all this hath Christianity undertaken. Her voice is, without distinction, to people of every colour, and clime, and condition: to the continent and the isles; to the man of the city, the man of the field, and the man of the woods; to the Moor, the Hindoo, and the Hottentot; to the sick and desperate; to the beggar, the convict, and the slave. She impairs no faculty, interdicts no affection, infringes no relation; but, taking men as they are, with all their depravity and woes, she proffers them peace and blessedness. Her boasting is not vain. The course of experiment has lasted through more than fifty generations of men. It is passing every hour before our eyes; and, for reasons to be afterwards assigned, has never failed, in a single instance, when it has been fairly tried.

The design is stupendous; and the least success induces us to inquire, by whom it was projected and carried into effect. And what is our astonishment, when we learn, that it was by men of obscure birth, mean education, and feeble resource: by men from a nation hated for their religion, and proverbial for their moroseness; by carpenters, and tax-gatherers, and fishermen of Judea! What shall we say of this phenomenon? A recurrence to the Jewish Scriptures, which had long predicted it, either surrenders the argument, or increases the difficulty. If you admit that they reveal futurity, you recognise the finger of God, and the

controversy is at an end. If you call them mere conjectures, you are still to account for their correspondence with the event, and to explain how a great system of benevolence, unheard, unthought of by learned antiquity, came to be cherished, to be transmitted for centuries from father to son, and at length attempted, among the *Jews*! And you are also contradicted by the fact, that however clearly such a system is marked out in their scriptures, they were so far from adopting it, that they entirely mistook it; rejected it, nationally, with disdain; persecuted unto death those who embarked in it; and have not embraced it to this day. Yet in the midst of this bigoted and obstinate people, sprang up the deliverance of the human race. *Salvation is of the Jews*. Within half a century after the resurrection of Christ, his disciples had penetrated to the extremes of the Roman empire, and had carried the *day-spring from on high* to innumerable tribes who were *sitting in the region and shadow of death*. And so exclusively *Christian* is this plan, so remote from the sphere of common effort, that after it has been proposed and executed, men revert perpetually to their wonted littleness and carelessness. The whole face of Christendom is overspread with proofs, that, in proportion as they depart from the simplicity of the gospel, they forget the multitude as before, and the doctrines of consolation expire. In so far, too, as they adapt to their own notions of propriety, the general idea, which they have borrowed from the gospel, of meliorating the condition of their species, they have produced, and are every day producing, effects the very reverse of their professions. Discontent, and confusion, and crimes, they propagate in abundance. They have smitten the earth with curses, and deluged it with blood; but the instance is yet to be discovered, in which they have *bound up the broken-hearted*. The fact, therefore, that Christianity is, in the broadest sense of the terms, *glad tidings to the poor*, is perfectly original. It stands without rival or comparison. It has no foundation in the principles of human enterprise; and could never have existed without the inspiration of that *Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and every perfect gift*.

II. As the Christian FACT is original, so the REASONS OF ITS EFFICACY ARE PECULIAR. Christianity can afford consolation, because *it is fitted to our nature and character*. I specify particulars:

First. The gospel proceeds upon the principle of *immortality*.

That our bodies shall die is indisputable. But that reluctance of nature, that panting after life, that horror of annihilation, of which no man can completely divest himself, connect the death of the body with deep solicitude. While neither these, nor any other merely rational considerations, ascertain the certainty of future being; much less

of future bliss. The feeble light which glimmered around this point among the heathen, flowed not from investigation, but tradition. It was to be seen chiefly among the vulgar, who inherited the tales of their fathers; and among the poets, who preferred popular fable to philosophic speculation. Reason would have pursued her discovery; but the pagans knew not how to apply the notion of immortality, even when they had it. It governed not their precepts; it established not their hope. When they attempted to discuss the grounds of it, *they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened*: The best arguments of Socrates are unworthy of a child, who has *learned the holy scriptures*. And it is remarkable enough, that the doctrine of immortality is as perfectly detached, and as barren of moral effect, in the hands of modern infidels, as it was in the hands of the ancient pagans. They have been so unable to assign it a convenient place in their system; they have found it to be so much at variance with their habits, and so troublesome in their warfare with the scriptures, that the more resolute of the sect have discarded it altogether. With the soberer part of them it is no better than an opinion; but it never was, and never will be a source of true consolation, in any system or any bosom, but the system of Christianity and the bosom of the Christian. *Life and immortality*, about which some have guessed; for which all have sighed; but of which none could trace the relations, or prove the existence; are not merely hinted, *they are brought to light by the gospel*. This is the parting point with every other religion; and yet the very point upon which our happiness hangs. That we shall survive the body, and pass from its dissolution to the bar of God, and from the bar of God to endless retribution, are truths of infinite moment, and of pure revelation. They demonstrate the incapacity of temporal things to content the soul. They explain why grandeur, and pleasure, and fame, leave the heart sad. He who pretends to be my comforter without consulting my immortality, overlooks my essential want. The gospel supplies it. Immortality is the basis of her fabric. She resolves the importance of man into its true reason—the *value of his soul*. She sees under every human form, however rugged or abused, a spirit unalterable by external change, unassailable by death, and endued with stupendous faculties of knowledge and action, of enjoyment and suffering; a spirit, at the same time, depraved and guilty; and therefore liable to irreparable ruin. These are Christian views. They elevate us to a height, at which the puny theories of the world stand and gaze. They stamp new interest on all my relations, and all my acts. They hold up before me objects vast as my wishes, terrible as my fears, and permanent as my being. They bind me to eternity.

Secondly. Having thus unfolded the general doctrine of immortality, the gospel advances further, informing us, that although a future life is sure, *future blessedness is by no means a matter of course.* This receives instant confirmation from a review of our character as *sinners.*

None but an atheist, or, which is the same thing, a madman, will deny the existence of moral obligation, and the sanction of moral law. In other words, that it is our duty to obey God, and that he has annexed penalties to disobedience. As little can it be denied, that we have actually disobeyed him. Guilt has taken up its abode in the conscience, and indicates, by signs not to be misunderstood, both its presence and power. To call this superstition, betrays only that vanity, which thinks to confute a doctrine by giving it an ill name. Depravity and its consequences meet us, at every moment, in a thousand shapes; nor is there an individual breathing, who has escaped its taint. Therefore our relations to our Creator as innocent creatures have ceased; and are succeeded by the relation of rebels against his government. In no other light can he contemplate us, because his *judgment is according to truth.* A conviction of this begets alarm and wretchedness. And, whatever some may pretend, a guilty conscience is the secret worm, which preys upon the vitals of human peace: the invisible spell, which turns the draught of pleasure into wormwood and gall. To laugh at it as an imaginary evil, is the mark of a fool: for what can be more rational than to tremble at the displeasure of an almighty God. If, then, I ask how I am to be delivered? or whether deliverance is possible? human reason is dumb: or if she open her lips, it is only to tease me with conjectures, which evince that she knows nothing of the matter. Here the Christian verity interferes; showing me, on the one hand, that my alarm is well founded; that my demerit and danger are far beyond even my own suspicions; that God, with whom I have to do, *will by no means clear the guilty;* but on the other hand, revealing the provision of his infinite wisdom and grace, for releasing me from guilt. *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.* The more I ponder this method of salvation, the more I am convinced that it displays the divine perfection, and exalts the divine government; so that *it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.* Now I know where to obtain the first requisite to happiness, pardon of sin. In Christ Jesus, the Lord, is that justifying righteousness, the want of which, though I

was ignorant of the cause, kept me miserable till this hour. I cling to it, and am safe. His precious blood *purges my conscience*. It *extends peace to me as a river, and the glory of redemption like a flowing stream*. My worst fears are dispelled: *the wrath to come* is not for me; I can look with composure at futurity, and feel joy springing up with the thought that I am immortal.

Thirdly. In addition to deliverance from wrath, Christianity provides relief against the *plague of the heart*.

It will not be contested, that disorder reigns among the passions of men. The very attempts to rectify it are a sufficient concession; and their ill success shows their authors to have been *physicians of no value*. That particular ebullitions of passion have been repressed, and particular habits of vice overcome, without Christian aid, is admitted. But if any one shall conclude, that these are examples of victory over the *principle* of depravity, he will greatly err. For, not to insist that the experience of the world is against him, we have complete evidence, that all reformatations, not evangelical, are merely an exchange of lusts; or rather, the elevation of one evil appetite by the depression of another; the *strength* of depravity continuing the same; its *form* only varied. Nor can it be otherwise. Untaught of God, the most comprehensive genius is unable either to trace the original of corruption, or to check its force. It has its fountain where he least and last believes it to be; but where the omniscient eye has searched it out; in the human heart; the heart, filled with *enmity against God*—the heart, *deceitful above all things and desperately wicked*. “But, the discovery being made, his measures, you hope, will take surer effect.” Quite the contrary. It now defies his power, as it formerly did his wisdom. How have disciples of the moral school studied and toiled! how have they resolved, and vowed, and fasted, watched, and prayed, traveling through the whole circuit of devout austerities! and set down at last, *wearied in the greatness of their way!* But no marvel! the *Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots*. Neither can impurity purify itself. Here again, light from the footsteps of the Christian truth breaks in upon the darkness; and gospel again flows from her tongue; the gospel of a *new heart*—the gospel of regenerating and sanctifying grace; as the promise, the gift, the work of God. “*I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you; a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh; and I will give you an heart of flesh; and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.*” Here all our difficulties are re-

solved at once. The spirit of life in Christ Jesus, quickens *the dead in trespasses and sins*. The Lord, our strength, works in us *all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power*. That which was impossible with men, is not so with him; for *with him all things are possible*; even the *subduing our iniquities*; creating us anew, after his own image, in *knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness*; turning our polluted souls into his own *habitation through the Spirit*; and making us *meet for the inheritance of the saints in light*. Verily *this is gospel*; worthy to go in company with remission of sin. And shall I conquer at last? Shall I, indeed, be delivered from the bondage and the torment of corruption? A new sensation passes through my breast. *I lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help*; and with the hope of *perfecting holiness in the fear of God*, hail my immortality.

Fourthly. Having thus removed our guilt and cleansed our affections, the gospel proceeds to put us in possession of *adequate enjoyment*. An irresistible law of our being impels us to seek happiness. Nor will a million of frustrated hopes deter from new experiments; because despair is infinitely more excruciating than the fear of fresh disappointment. But an impulse, always vehement and never successful, multiplies the materials and inlets of pain. This assertion carries with it, its own proof; and the principle it assumes is verified by the history of our species. In every place, and at all times, ingenuity has been racked to meet the ravenous desires. Occupation, wealth, dignity, science, amusement, all have been tried; are all tried at this hour; and all in vain. The heart still repines: the unappeased cry is, Give, give. There is a fatal error somewhere; and the gospel detects it. Fallen away from God, we have substituted the creature in his place. This is the grand mistake: the fraud which sin has committed upon our nature. The gospel reveals God as the satisfying good, and brings it within our reach. It proclaims him reconciled in Christ Jesus, as our father, our friend, our portion. It introduces us into his presence with liberty to ask in the Intercessor's name, and asking, *to receive, that our joy may be full*. It keeps us under his eye; surrounds us with his arm; feeds us upon *living bread* which he *gives from heaven*: seals us up to an eternal inheritance; and even engages to reclaim our dead bodies from the grave, and fashion them in beauty, which shall vie with heaven! It is enough! My prayers and desires can go no further: I have got to the *fountain of living waters*—*Return to thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee!*

This gospel of immortality, in righteousness, purity, and bliss, would be inestimable, were it even obscure, and not to be comprehended without painful scrutiny. But I observe again,

Fifthly. That, unlike the systems of men, and contrary to their anticipations, the gospel is as *simple*, as it is glorious. Its primary doctrines, though capable of exercising the most disciplined talent, are adapted to the common understanding. Were they dark and abstruse, they might gratify a speculative mind, but would be lost upon the multitude, and be unprofitable to all, as doctrines of consolation. The mass of mankind never can be profound reasoners. To omit other difficulties, they have not leisure. Instruction, to do them good, must be interesting, solemn, repeated and plain. This is the benign office of the gospel. Her principal topics are few; they are constantly recurring in various connexions; they come home to every man's condition; they have an interpreter in his bosom: they are enforced by motives which honesty can hardly mistake, and conscience will rarely dispute. Unlettered men, who love their bible, seldom quarrel about the prominent articles of faith and duty; and as seldom do they appear among the proselytes of that meagre refinement which arrogates the title of *Philosophical Christianity*.

From its simplicity, moreover, the gospel derives advantages in consolation. Grief, whether in the learned or illiterate, is always simple. A man, bowed down under calamity, has no relish for investigation. His powers relax; he leans upon his comforter; his support must be without toil, or his spirit faints. Conformably to these reflections, we see, on the one hand, that the unlearned compose the bulk of Christians; the life of whose souls is in the substantial doctrines of the cross—and on the other, that in the time of affliction even the careless lend their ear to the voice of revelation. Precious, at all times, to believers, it is doubly precious in the hour of trial. These things prove, not only that the gospel, when understood, gives a peculiar relief in trouble, but that it is readily apprehended; being most acceptable, when we are the least inclined to critical research.

Sixthly. The gospel, so admirable for its simplicity, has also, the recommendation of *truth*. The wretch who dreams of transport, feels a new sting in his wretchedness, when he opens his eyes and the delusion is fled. No real misery can be removed, nor any real benefit conferred, by doctrines which want the seal of certainty. And were the gospel of Jesus a human invention; or were it checked by any rational suspicion, that it may turn out to be a fable; it might retain its brilliancy, its sublimity, and even a portion of its interest; but the charm of its consolation would be gone. Nay, it would add gall to bitterness, by fostering a hope, which the next hour might laugh to scorn. But we may dismiss our anxiety; for there is no hazard of such an issue. Not only "grace," but "*truth*," came by Jesus Christ. *The gracious*

words which proceeded out of his mouth, were words of the Amen, the faithful and true Witness ; and those which he has written in his blessed book, are pure words, as silver tried in the furnace, purified seven times. His promises no man can deny to be exceeding great ; yet they derive their value to us from assurances, which, by satisfying the hardest conditions of evidence, render doubt not only inexcusable, but even criminal. *By two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.* Now, therefore, the promises of the gospel which are "exceeding great," are also "precious." We need not scruple to trust ourselves for this life and the life to come, upon that word which shall stand when *heaven and earth pass away*. Oh, it is this which makes Christianity glad tidings to the depressed and perishing ! No fear of disappointment ! No hope that shall *make ashamed* ! Under the feet of evangelical faith is a covenant-promise, and that promise is everlasting Rock. *I know*, said one, whose testimony is corroborated by millions in both worlds, *I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

Lastly. The gospel, as a system of consolation, is perfected by the authority and energy which accompany it. The devices of man originate in his fancy, and expire with his breath. Destitute of power, they play around depravity, like shadows round the mountain top, and vanish without leaving an impression. Their effect would be inconsiderable, could he manifest them to be true ; because he cannot compel the admission of truth itself into the human mind. Indifference, unreasonableness, prejudice, petulance, oppose to it an almost incredible resistance. We see this in the affairs of every day, and especially in the stronger conflicts of opinion and passion. Now, beside the opposition which moral truth has always to encounter, there is a particular reason why the truth of the gospel, though most salutary, though attested by every thing within us and around us ; by life and death ; by earth and heaven and hell ; will not succeed unless backed by divine energy. It is this. Sin has perverted the understanding of man, and poisoned his heart. It persuaded him first to throw away his blessedness, and then to hate it. The reign of this hatred, which the scriptures call *enmity against God*, is most absolute in every unrenowned man. It teaches him never to yield a point unfriendly to one corruption, without stipulating for an equivalent in favour of another. Now, as the gospel flatters *none* of his corruptions in *any* shape, it meets with deadly hostility from *all* his corruptions in *every* shape. It is to no purpose that you press upon him the "great salvation" ; that you demonstrate his errors and their

corrective ; his diseases and their cure. Demonstrate you may, but you convert him not. He will occasionally startle and listen ; but it is only to relapse into his wonted supineness : and you shall as soon call up the dead from their dust, as awaken him to a sense of his danger, and prevail with him to embrace the salvation of God. "Where then," you will demand, "is the pre-eminence of your gospel?" I answer, with the apostle Paul, that *it is the power of God to salvation*. When a sinner is to be converted, that is, when a slave is to be liberated from his chains, and a rebel from execution, that same voice which has spoken in the scriptures, speaks by them to his heart, and commands an audience.—He finds the word of God to be *quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword*. It sets him before the bar of Justice ; strips him of his self-importance ; *sweeps away his refuge of lies* ; and shows him that death which is *the wages of sin*. It then conducts him, all trembling, to the divine forgiveness ; reveals Christ Jesus in his soul, as his righteousness, his peace, his hope of glory. Amazing transition ! But is not the cause equal to the effect ? *Hath not the potter power over the clay* ? Shall God draw, and the lame not run ? Shall God speak, and the deaf not hear ? Shall God breathe, and the slain not live ? Shall God *lift up the light of his countenance* upon sinners reconciled in his dear Son, and they not be happy ? Glory to his name ! These are no fictions. *We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen*. *The record, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God ; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart*, is possessed by thousands who have *turned from the power of Satan unto God*, and will certify that the revolution was accomplished by his word. And if it perform such prodigies on corruption and death, what shall it not perform in directing, establishing, and consoling them, who have already obtained a *good hope through grace* ? He who thunders in the curse, speaks peace in the promise ; and none can conceive its influence but they who have witnessed it. For proofs you must not go to the statesman, the traveller, or the historian. You must not go to the gay profession, or the splendid ceremonial. You must go to the chamber of unostentatious piety. You must go to the family anecdote, to the Christian tradition, to the observation of faithful ministers. Of the last there are many who, with literal truth, might address you as follows. "I have seen this gospel hush into a calm the tempest raised in the bosom by conscious guilt.—I have seen it melt down the most obdurate into tenderness and contrition. I have seen it cheer up the broken-hearted, and bring the tear of gladness into eyes swollen with grief. I have seen it produce and maintain serenity under evils, which drive the worldling mad. I have seen it reconcile the sufferer to his cross, and send the song of praise from lips

quivering with agony. *I have seen* it enable the most affectionate relatives to part in death ; not without emotion, but without repining ; and with a cordial surrender of all that they held most dear, to the disposal of their heavenly Father. *I have seen* the fading eye brighten at the promise of Jesus, *Where I am, there shall my servant be also.* *I have seen* the faithful spirit released from its clay, now mildly, now triumphantly, to enter into the joy of its Lord."

Who, among the children of men, that *doubts* this representation, would not *wish* it to be correct ? Who, that thinks it only *probable*, will not welcome the doctrine on which it is founded, as *worthy of all acceptance* ? And who, that *knows* it to be true, will not set his seal to that doctrine as being, most emphatically, *gospel preached to the poor* ?

In applying to practical purposes, the account which has now been given of the Christian religion, I remark,

1. That it fixes a criterion of Christian ministrations.

If he, who *spake as never man spake*, has declared his own doctrine to abound with consolation to the miserable, then, certainly, the instructions of others are evangelical, only in proportion as they subserve the same gracious end. A contradiction not unfrequent among some advocates of revelation, is to urge against the infidel its power of comfort, and yet to avoid, in their own discourses, almost every principle from which that power is drawn. Disregarding the mass of mankind, to whom the gospel is peculiarly fitted; and omitting those truths which might revive the grieved spirit, or touch the slumbering conscience, they discuss their moral topics in a manner unintelligible to the illiterate, uninteresting to the mourner, and without alarm to the profane. This is not "preaching Christ." Elegant dissertations upon virtue and vice, upon the evidences of revelation, or any other general subject, may entertain the prosperous and the gay ; but they will not *mortify our members which are upon the earth* ; they will not unsting calamity, nor feed the heart with an imperishable hope. When I go to the house of God, I do not want amusement. I want *the doctrine which is according to godliness.* I want to hear of the remedy against the harassings of my guilt, and the disorder of my affections. I want to be led from weariness and disappointment, to that *goodness which filleth the hungry soul.* I want to have light upon the mystery of providence ; to be taught how the *judgments of the Lord are right* ; how I shall be prepared for duty and for trial—how I may *pass the time of my sojourning here in fear*, and close it in peace. Tell me of that Lord Jesus, *who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.* Tell me of his *intercession for the transgressors* as their advocate with

the Father. Tell me of his Holy Spirit, whom *they that believe on him receive*, to be their preserver, sanctifier, comforter. Tell me of his chastenings; their necessity, and their use. Tell me of his presence, and sympathy, and love. Tell me of the virtues, as growing out of his cross, and nurtured by his grace. Tell me of the glory reflected on his name by the obedience of faith. Tell me of vanquished death, of the purified grave, of a blessed resurrection, of the life everlasting—and my bosom warms. This is gospel; these are glad tidings to me as a sufferer, because glad to me as a sinner. They rectify my mistakes; allay my resentments; rebuke my discontent; support me under the weight of moral and natural evil. These attract the poor; steal upon the thoughtless; awe the irreverent; and throw over the service of the sanctuary a majesty, which some fashionable modes of address never fail to dissipate. Where they are habitually neglected, or lightly referred to, there may be much grandeur, but there is no gospel; and those preachers have infinite reason to tremble, who, though admired by the great, and caressed by the vain, are deserted by the poor, the sorrowful, and such as *walk humbly with their God.*

2. We should learn from the gospel, lessons of active benevolence.

The Lord Jesus, who *went about doing good*, has left us an example, *that we should follow his steps.* Christians, on whom he has bestowed affluence, rank, or talent, should be the last to disdain their fellow-men, or to look with indifference on indigence and grief. Pride, unseemly in all, is detestable in them, who confess that *by grace they are saved.* Their Lord and Redeemer, who humbled himself by assuming their nature, came to *deliver the needy, when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper.* And surely an object, which was not unworthy of the Son of God, cannot be unworthy of any who are called by his name. Their wealth and opportunities, their talents and time, are not their own, nor to be used according to their own pleasure; but to be consecrated by their vocation *as fellow-workers with God.* How many hands that hang down would be lifted up; how many feeble knees confirmed; how many tears wiped away; how many victims of despondency and infamy rescued by a close imitation of Jesus Christ. Go, with your opulence to the house of famine, and the retreats of disease. Go, *deal thy bread to the hungry; when thou seest the naked, cover him; and hide not thyself from thine own flesh.* Go, and furnish means to rear the offspring of the poor; that they may at least have access to the word of your God. Go, and quicken the flight of the Angel, who has *the everlasting gospel to preach* unto the nations. If you possess not wealth, employ your station in promoting good will toward men. Judge the fatherless; plead

for the widow. Stimulate the exertions of others, who may supply what is *lacking on your part.* Let the *beauties of holiness* pour their lustre upon your distinctions, and recommend to the unhappy that peace, which yourselves have found in the salvation of God. If you have neither riches nor rank, devote your *talents.* Ravishing are the accents, which dwell on *the tongue of the learned,* when it *speaks a word in season to him that is weary.* Press your genius and your eloquence into the service of the *Lord your righteousness,* to magnify his word, and display the riches of his grace. Who knoweth, whether he may honour you to be the minister of joy to the disconsolate, of liberty to the captive, of life to the dead? If he has denied you wealth, and rank, and talent, consecrate your *heart.* Let it dissolve in sympathy. There is nothing to hinder your *rejoicing with them that do rejoice, and your weeping with them that weep;* nor to forbid the interchange of kind and soothing offices. *A brother is born for adversity;* and not only should Christian be to Christian, *a friend that sticketh closer than a brother,* but he should exemplify the loveliness of his religion to *them that are without.* An action, a word, marked by the sweetness of the gospel, has often been owned of God for producing the happiest effects. Let no man, therefore, try to excuse his inaction; for no man is too inconsiderable to augment the triumphs of the gospel, by assisting in the consolation which it yields to the miserable.

3. Let all classes of the unhappy repair to the Christian truth, and *draw water with joy out of its wells of salvation!* Assume your own characters, O ye children of men; present your grievances, and accept the consolation which the gospel tenders. Come, now, ye tribes of pleasure, who have exhausted your strength in pursuing phantoms that retire at your approach! The voice of the Son of God in the gospel is, *Wherefore spend ye your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not; hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness!* Come, ye tribes of ambition, who burn for the applause of your fellow worms. The voice of the Son of God to you is, *The friendship of this world is enmity with God; but if any serve me, him will my Father honour.* Come, ye avaricious, who pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor. The voice of the Son of God is, *Wisdom is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her—but what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* Come, ye profane! The voice of the Son of God is, *Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness; behold I bring near my righteousness.* Come ye formal and self-sufficient, who say that ye are rich, and increased with

goods and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. The voice of the Son of God is, *I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire that ye may be rich; and white raiment that ye may be clothed; and that the shame of your nakedness do not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that ye may see.* Come, ye, who, being convinced of sin, fear least the fierce anger of the Lord fall upon you. The voice of the Son of God is, *Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.* Come, ye disconsolate, whose souls are sad, because the Comforter is away. The voice of the Son of God is, *The Lord hath sent me to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.* Come, ye tempted, who are borne down with the violence of the law in your members, and of assaults from the evil one. The voice of the Son of God is, *I will be merciful to your unrighteousnesses; and the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.* Come, ye children of domestic woe, upon whom the Lord has made a breach, by taking away your counsellors and support. The voice of the Son of God is, *Leave thy fatherless children with me; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.* Come, ye, from whom mysterious providence has swept away the acquisitions of long and reputable industry. The voice of the Son of God is, *My son, if thou wilt receive my words, thou shalt have a treasure in the heavens that faileth not; and mayest take joyfully the spoiling of thy goods, knowing that thou hast in heaven a better and an enduring substance.* Come, ye poor, who without property to lose, are grappling with distress and exposed to want. The Son of God, though the heir of all things, *had not where to lay his head;* and his voice to his poor is, *Be content with such things as ye have, for I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure.* Come, ye reproached, who find cruel mockings a most bitter persecution. The voice of the Son of God is, *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the spirit of God and of glory resteth upon you.* Come, in fine, ye dejected, whom the fear of death holds in bondage. The voice of the Son of God is, *I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues! O grave, I will be thy destruction! repentance shall be hid from mine eyes!—Blessed Jesus! thy loving kindness shall be my joy in the house of my pilgrimage! and I will praise thee while I have any being, for that gospel which thou hast preached to the poor!*